WILLIAM A. LITTLE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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MINISTER, MOUNT ZION BAPTIST CHURCH

INTERVIEWEE: SAMUEL MCKINNEY

INTERVIEWERS: WILLIAM LITTLE

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[00:00:00] **SAMUEL MCKINNEY:** …If Tyree Scott was white, all the way down there to attend the initial call, to try to pull together the Black contractors from around the nation. And it is from this that the local for us began. We met with him earlier, [inaudible] encouraged them, they seemed to have their own agenda, and I didn't feel that the operation was working. Tried to encourage people to go be supportive of them. A lot of church people had problems with their rugged style and operation, and I can understand that. They had several meetings and it seemed that someone was always getting whipped over them. [Inaudible] every time they'd leave the meeting, someone was beat up on, jumped on.

A lot of people just sort of backed up a bit. Yet, they knew that the cause was a right one, many of them were fearful of participating in what tended to be violent. They were still pretty much in harmony with their overall goal. Now, I'm not quite too sure there were some dynamics, but I'm not too sure of all that, as they related to

what I think you're talking about [inaudible] . The ministers were asked to sit in on some meetings, and we sat in on some meetings. We did not try to manipulate, we wanted to see who—since we were invited, to see where folks were coming from.

[00:02:02] **WILLIAM LITTLE:** I wasn't saying that you were trying to manipulate, I said—

[00:02:05] **SAMUEL:** The ministers were. It didn't work, if it was true because, what I have said to some of the labor folks is, if anything we have a lovers quarrel, with labor. The congregation is made up of working folks, union people. So it would be foolish for me or any other clergyman to be anti-labor or anti-union, plus I had belonged to the unions in the past myself, had to make money working in other kinds of ways. And my biggest quarrel is that labor has not been fair to a segment of the working population, which is Black. And through all types of chicanery and other methods and guises to keep from giving us our just due. They have resorted to all types of things. So we are not anti-labor, and we have worked with a fellow from the NAACP, talked to the chairman trying to set up a Black labor union. We were just barely giving lip-service, giving a forum, giving a platform.

It was also quite apparent that at one time someone would call a press conference and everyone would show up, and that doesn't happen anymore. Then there was the—then it was also quite apparent that the Black construction workers or contractors, whichever group, they wanted to be out front, so they wanted to be on TV, so they were taking from anybody that wants glory, if that's glory. What I am really saying is, it is a different type of role. Everybody can't lead everything, so about time people have to recognize that they can't produce everything. They have to understand that they have to wait. Sometimes we go in they and say what is difficult for others to say, and then back on up and let them do their thing.

Now, what's this being used for, a class?

[00:04:56] **WILLIAM:** No, my dissertation.

[00:04:57] **SAMUEL:** Your dissertation. Now as far as the Black contractors are concerned, we recognized very early the problems they had in getting bonded and buying materials. We saw also that this was a game that was being used against them. All these little [inaudible] . It fit right in. And I know we just came through [inaudible] going into the contract. And we policed that and said that at no time would they ever be less than. But the contractors misunderstood us, we said that we would want 15%, we said that there would never be less than 15% on the job at any one time, that is the difference between saying less than 15% or no more than. And they assumed that we were saying no more than. Cause they came up here to shut the job down, and 40% of the people on the job were non-white. I think that there was also a concern that after a while some of these dudes wouldn't have any control themselves. They would get other forces.

[00:06:23] **WILLIAM:** Folks taking over?

[00:06:24] **SAMUEL:** Yeah.

[00:06:26] **WILLIAM:** Well, let's backtrack a little bit and start with the Garfield demonstrations in '69. And at that point in time—I think, I haven't read all the newspaper articles that I've collected so far—there's some suggestion that you supported that and you was out there demonstrating at the Garfield project.

[00:06:46] **SAMUEL:** Yeah, I mean, we were trying to support everyone, every worker, every advocacy, all the efforts in our community, for justice and fairness. I wasn't out in front of it, but I was out there supporting it.

[00:07:03] **WILLIAM:** I can't remember exactly what started it. I know labor, Tyree mentioned it to me, he was saying that some group was trying to negotiate a Home Town Plan here, in the Seattle area and was trying to not go through the CCA—I think it's CCA at that point in time. And they was trying to negotiate without directly negotiating with them. And that's the same old, ancient old strategy white men use all the time, divide and conquer. I would like to find out who contacted you and try to develop this negotiation.

[00:07:43] **SAMUEL:** I'm not quite clear [who contacted about negotiations] because I wasn't deep into it. I remember going to some meetings, but I came out just as confused as when I went in. And I think, it was never made clear to me, what was the name of the game, who the players were, what was happening.

[00:08:07] **WILLIAM:** Okay, so you can't respond, that's fine. You know anybody I can contact to get some information? Because I would question my ability to get something—

[00:08:16] **SAMUEL:** One man is down in the Bay Area who was around most of us, is the Reverend James Stewart at the Ecumenical Metropolitan Ministry. He's down in the Bay Area, in Berkeley.

[00:08:27] **WILLIAM:** Yeah, I know Stewart, I worked with him quite a bit. Okay, I'll get on that and make some telephone calls. [laughs]

Another thing, which is not our most covered thing, is that conflict between you and Tyree about shutting down the church, and he relayed a bit that he was wrong during that.

[00:08:52] **SAMUEL:** Well yes, he did, what it boiled down to was—and I'm not trying to push that thing because all people make mistakes—it all resulted in that they were closing some of these jobs at the South End, and they wanted Black community support. I saw one of the speeches. In fact, some whites [inaudible] without people who were working for the broader community. And I called Tyree and he asked me about all these white folks on the job. And I told him to come inside and see what was going on. He said, "Yeah, you see white folks on the rooftops, those brothers don't get up on the side of the building, I am told. And these white boys who were doing the slanted roof told me that they did all the work for the Seattle Housing Corporation, all these Black contractors, they said Black men would work on a flat roof, but they don't climb up on the side." Well, that's true. Well, I mentioned that we wrote it into the contract, we went through the CCA, in fact we tried to get a member of the church to build it, Johnny Allen. Well, [inaudible] and Johnny tried to get things going, and it cost us three quarters of a percent, one of them seven and a half, up two. [alarm goes off] Three quarters of eight and a half. But we were up against—coming out of [inaudible] .

Well, what this boiled down to was that they never came and said, "What are you fellas doing? How can we be included on the job?" They drove around and saw white folks and said, "They ought to get out of here, the Black community." We held up the bidding on this building one week to give all the brothers who wanted to do the job, cause some of them said Johnny Allen ain't going in on the contract. We held up the bidding one week to give them all a chance, and none of them showed up. We then went to open bid process. We took electrical out of the contract so we could put Luke in. Luke's in the electrical supply [business] , and they had a $1000 contract for electrical. We tried to get J.P. Francis, but he was tied up and could not. We tried several ways to—well, we had various suppliers, different ones who had two or three people working on the contract. The electricians were just about all Black. We had ten or twelve Blacks working at different points. Plus Chicanos, Asians, and some others.

We went to a meeting one night after Tyree's thing, and they were going to go there and they thought the town was going to blow up. And the president of the union called in, and the president of the retail corporation, and I

went over to the office and [inaudible] Tyree and they spoke to the next boy and they marched off. And he said, "I could see that Tyree was under pressure." And then they went from here on over there.

Now, one of the reporters said to me, "Why weren't the police over here when they were over at the Community College and the hospital? It doesn't feel that it was a Black on Black confrontation. The whites moved out of the way." Well, what they soon wanted to do was to cloud the issues and make it look like we were fighting with each other, which we were not doing. The police told me that they didn't know about them marching up, I told them they were lying. Because they told me that their plants inside of the organization, their pigeon system, told them exactly, every movement was made and some Black folks said, "We need to leave the church alone." And some white folks said, "No, no, you had to do it. You had to do it." [inaudible] In fact, some people accused me of paying Tyree. [inaudible] just to get folks together for that. That's not true. And as soon as he said that he made a mistake I dropped the issue, and I won't say anymore about it. So that's basically it. He was under certain pressure internally.

Now, the next Monday I went over by myself and talked to James, his assistant. He was Tyree's assistant. I said to him as I looked around in his office, the only Black person on that wall was Malcolm X. And he had the whole cast: [inaudible] Castro, Mao Tse Tung. I mean, alright, that's their thing, but I said, "You just got Black folks, a lot of them, went from being Negros the other day to being Black. And you come on with this Third World stuff and they're not quite ready for it yet."

[00:15:22] **WILLIAM:** That was the next question I was going to ask you, about the ideological frame of reference, between Tyree Scott—

[00:15:28] **SAMUEL:** Well, he was aware that Black folks, a lot of Black folks, the younger ones were there. And a lot of them I don't think were that eager because they hear the Chicanos at the university level [inaudible] . And Tyree is going [?with whatever goes with them?] .

[00:15:46] **WILLIAM:** So you're suggesting that his constituency has significantly shifted from '69 to the present?

[00:15:52] **SAMUEL:** It started off with Black, and Tyree was stabbed in the back by the folks who he thought were [?friends?] .

[00:16:11] **WILLIAM:** Could you elaborate on that some more, because I don't understand it directly. I know he got beat up and some other type of…but I don't know—

[00:16:16] **SAMUEL:** That's basically it, I don't know all the ins and outs of the things but that pretty much is what it is. Some people he had been around—whenever you have a movement—let me put it in ideological framework—There are people who want different things, and their goals may not always be the same. And when different ones are choosing what they want if they choose it, they get off and the fight in them dies. There were folks who were riding his coattails to get out of the movement what they wanted, so they got [inaudible] . And so he had to go with people he could trust. He felt and I felt, and I said it to him, "Tyree, some of these folks, when they get out of you they ain't got no style. But the moment they figure they know what you know, they are through with you. They got to come back to the same community that washed you, and nurtured you,

and helped you along."

[00:17:20] **WILLIAM:** How about his legitimacy? I'll develop another question. I hadn't raised some of these questions, but I don't think I need to do that now. In terms of legitimacy now and legitimacy then, I'm pretty sure he doesn't have the grassroots support within the Black community.

[00:17:34] **SAMUEL:** He does?

[00:17:36] **WILLIAM:** I'm saying he doesn't.

[00:17:38] **SAMUEL:** Now I think, and you can get on my thing—you see, there are conflicting reports out about it, some say that he is paid by the government, he didn't do this, he's [?running around?] posing over here, so credibility needs to be cleared up.

[00:17:55] **WILLIAM:** Cause otherwise you've got a lot of rumors about the fact that Tyree is taking money, large sums of money.

[00:18:01] **SAMUEL:** Yeah, I mean those things, I haven't heard anything about it lately.

[00:18:02] **WILLIAM:** I know that's not true, but…

[00:18:09] **SAMUEL:** I don't think it is either. But when a person is a leader, they have to let it be known, "This is where I am, this is where I'm coming from, this is the source of my support."

[00:18:24] **WILLIAM:** So you raised another issue about the community itself, its perception of the leadership, of its leaders. If you're going to be a leader for long within the Black community, you must have some kind of legitimacy and credibility. And credibility based on the ability to say exactly what you're coming from.

[00:18:39] **SAMUEL:** You see the same kind of leadership that's based upon what one can develop, and that shifts according to the method of delivery. Under the old law of poverty you have certain roles to deliver. Now in the city you got another role. Now the folks who were delivering under the war on poverty, it is still delivering now, there is something about their facilities to shift gears. But still they are coming out of the public trough. White folks might call them leaders because they have this ability. Some people criticize the churches and pastors about their leadership roles, but I'll support the cause of the Black folks, [?and it might burden?] the white folks, but my salary, all the money that I get comes from Black folks. So whether the ministers live up to their responsibility—now, this is a source—is the fact that they are supported by the community, as perhaps few people who are. They have a freedom there that if they don't exercise it—

[00:20:05] **WILLIAM:** Yeah, a lot of people have pointed to that, a lot of scholars have pointed that out.

[00:20:08] **SAMUEL:** Oh, yes.

[00:20:12] **WILLIAM:** But how do you perceive Scott fitting into a leadership role in this community? Because he did come out of the community. His roots are within this particular community.

[00:20:22] **SAMUEL:** Well, I have ambivalent feelings. One was that when he started running around out there, his father, who—well, one, everybody who knows Tyree and has seen his work is convinced that he is a good worker, he's a skilled worker. Another thing: his father's business would be further on if he had stuck with it. His father is not the electrician that his son is. Tyree is a better electrician than his father. Both of them worked on the house, both of them worked on this church.

[00:21:03] **WILLIAM:** So in other words, it's the amount of remuneration that he didn't provide for his family? It's a family thing also, that people may look at and take and judge from an economic point of view? For example, my father's a plumber, and I also was a plumber, but my father's a better plumber than I am and vice versa. I'm a better businessman than my father. He can't function in the business world, he doesn't really know how to deal with money or deal with people, but he knows how to put the stuff in. Now, if I had stayed there and worked with him, he would have been fairly successful in the business, because I could've took over the technical aspects and operations, which he doesn't have the technical skill. And some people may look at me as a total failure in the sense that I didn't stick with my father and work with him in the business and develop some [inaudible] as opposed to sticking it out into the academic community.

[00:22:08] **SAMUEL:** Yes, I'm not saying that's my position.

[00:22:11] **WILLIAM:** But I'm saying that some people in the community may look at it that way.

[00:22:19] **SAMUEL:** Yes, I'm just stating, this is a collision of us [inaudible] cause my father was [inaudible] and I didn't stay there and settle with him, wait for him to pass and try to take over. There was a feeling that Tyree was a better businessman, too, that kind of thing, but I mean, [inaudible] . And Tyree got caught up on a mission and Tyree had developed in a sense a kind of…

[00:22:57] **WILLIAM:** Complex?

[00:22:53] **SAMUEL:** Complex. He was embodying his position and his drive, dreaming of his goal.

[00:23:07] **WILLIAM:** Could you perceive that as being forced upon him, or was it just by inheriting his psychological makeup? What I'm suggesting—

[00:23:16] **SAMUEL:** Well, I think he was kind of forced in a situation, and the psychological makeup can adjust.

[00:23:23] **WILLIAM:** What I was gonna try to point out is the relationship between American Friends and Tyree Scott and their philosophy in the initial stages of development and the type of support, I think that could have some effect. And I'm just asking for your opinion.

[00:23:39] **SAMUEL:** You know white folks, wherever they put their money, they want us to reflect what they have, what they can pull off. He brought a lot of color and dash to town which was sadly lacking at that point. And he gave the TV folks some exciting moments. And we see them [?going down to the airport and the university?] . It was crazy.

I was out at the airport, and [inaudible] marching them down to the end of the B concourse. All those people who followed him down there were trapped. Just a handful of police could come in and wipe them down. [alarm goes off] I guess we're talking about the logistics, I was wondering about the strategy that they were using. Shay and all the rest of the folks that they wanted to see, they should've moved folks up to the top floor and sat in his office and controlled the elevator, instead of moving folks up and down the corridor.

I guess some people wondered about tactics, but they wondered about all [inaudible] . It's like this: we need all the help that we can get, and one person alone can't deliver it all, and we need everybody to do their things. Now, there is a role that Tyree can do and has done, and if like I've heard folks say, you can stay, but if you are the target, from the Black perspective, [inaudible] , but I know he says he's broadened his base to Third World and all these disadvantaged people, but I guess that's the way we have to go. But we have to get there before we

can go there. We have to get to this point before we can get to that point, and a lot of Black folks haven't gotten to this point, and somebody has to get them there, otherwise this train will be off with nobody on it.

[00:26:29] **WILLIAM:** Okay, I don't think I have any other questions, so that's probably it.

[00:26:34] **SAMUEL:** Now, what is your thesis entitled?

[00:26:35] **WILLIAM:** Black Community Organization and Leadership: A Case Study in Seattle.

[00:26:41] **SAMUEL:** And you're concentrating on Tyree?

[BREAK IN RECORDING OF INTERVIEW]

[00:26:45] **WILLIAM:** I've got to make sure I cite the right things before I start saying anything about where the information came from. [pages flipping] I got an offer to teach at a church school.

[00:27:09] **SAMUEL:** Where's this?

[00:27:10] **WILLIAM:** I got an offer to teach at a church school. New Jersey. Drew University.

[00:27:18] **SAMUEL:** Oh yeah, that's Methodist.